Together

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Together

by hannibalatemyass

Summary

Will was a drifter until he found a town he liked. He ends up knocking on the door of a man that would change his life more than he could ever have imagined.

Chapter 1

He raises a hand to knock on the man's door. For being so far out in the middle of fields and woods, the house is a grand statement. Will hopes the man behind the door has some form of work he needs done, otherwise he would be following his dad up river for work. Unlike everywhere else he's been, Will finds he really enjoys this small town. He likes the amount of rivers and streams that lead to a large inland lake that looks like an ocean when the fog comes in. He likes how there aren't many questions as to why he walked everywhere, or prodding inquiries about eye contact.

To top it all off, the land was welcoming. In some parts the spirits of the land were often what drove Will and Beau to move on. Here they welcomed Will, and his sight seemed to be something the spirits found charming. It's what led Will to make the decision to try to stay behind, and his father, though he didn't have the sight, understood. It'd be a form of hell for Will, moving around all his life, never finding true peace.

The large oak door creaked open, and a tall man with amber eyes looked down at the muscular man on his door step. When he spoke, Will swore he saw the man's eyes flash for a brief moment to a bright white color. "Hello, is there something I can help you with?"

Swallowing down his concerns, Will found himself keeping his eyes on the man's to see if they did it again. "My name is Will, I'm looking for work if you have any."

More amused looking despite his face not changing much, the man in the doorway asks, "May I ask what type of work you specialize in?"

"I'm a jack of all trades," Will answers, "And I've done a little bit of everything. Repair work is where I excel, but I'm not struggling if you need something hunted or grown. Labor isn't an issue either."

"And are you alone?" the man asks, glancing around their surroundings. He doesn't see anyone in the fields or woods line, so his shoulders lose a touch of their tension.

"I am," Will answers, crossing his arms. "My dad headed up river to seek more work, I wanted to try my hand a little more here."

"I'm Hannibal Lecter," the man introduces himself, seemingly pleased when Will doesn't react to his name. If he was actually from around here, his name should've been warning enough to leave. No one especially liked to enter the home of a man with so many rumors swirling about him. "Please, come in. I was just getting ready to have lunch. We can discuss our business dealings then."

"As long as I'm not intruding," Will nods, and he swears he can see something glimmering for just above Hannibal's head for a moment… like a glamor trying to hide something… if only he had a longer look.

“Of course not, you’re officially my guest,” Hannibal smiles and steps off to the side so that Will can enter the grand entryway. It reeks of money, and old money at that.

“Thank you for your hospitality then,” Will speaks as he looks around with his eyes at the wood work that decorated the house. A lot of it was in need of some touching up, but nothing a little sanding and staining couldn’t fix. A couple balusters were missing from the stairs case, but Will was already certain he could turn new ones without issue. The wood shop in town has a lot of tools you could rent use of.

“I recently inherited this place,” Hannibal informs Will as they walk. “I’m afraid all of it needs a good deal of touching up. Once the main house for the Lecter family, it’s fallen into minor disrepair over the last century. I’ve patched what I was able, but I’m afraid it requires a more trained eye than mine.”

“I haven’t seen anything I haven’t fixed in dozens of other households,” Will assures Hannibal as he follows him into the kitchen. On the island, there are already two plates with identical meals prepared. “Did I scare your company off?”

“Not at all,” Hannibal smirks, mostly to himself. “Let’s say I had a feeling you were coming today.”

“Were you bestowed a gift as well?” Will asks as he sits when prompted. The sandwich on his plate is pulled pork, and Will is very aware of the slight buzz it gives. It’s definitely human meat.

“Of sorts,” Hannibal’s smirk dims into a curious stare as he sees recognition flick across Will’s face for a moment. “I suppose it takes knowing what a gift is to be able to question it in others.”

“It does,” Will answers, picking up half of the sandwich. While making eye contact with Hannibal, he takes a bite out of the sandwich. Hannibal’s eyes have flitted to Will’s mouth, watching him chew… then watching his throat move as he swallows the bite.

“Is the sandwich to your liking? I’ve seen you dip into the sandwich shop in town a few times for a similar meal,” Hannibal asks as he eyes Will for any take away that he’s going to lie.

“It’s delicious,” Will nods, looking down at where he took a bite before looking back to Hannibal. “It’s always refreshing to be able to taste the flavors of home.”

There’s no denying that Hannibal is intrigued at this point, and he prods, “Nothing could ever quite compare to a mother’s own home cooking, could it not?”

“No, but some dishes come extremely close,” Will turns slightly in his seat so he’s facing Hannibal more. “Is this a family recipe?”

“I’m afraid my mother and father weren’t part of the living long enough to bestow familial culinary secrets upon their children,” Hannibal answers, and their testing of each other comes to a close for now. It’d be a shame to let a good meal go cold, especially when Hannibal had timed his preparations perfectly.

After their meal, Hannibal gives Will a tour of the house, inside and out. There's some patches of hardwood flooring that need to be entirely replaced. All of the chimneys need some repair work and cleaning, as well as the fireplaces they're attached to. The kitchen mostly needs finishing work done, and Hannibal already has wallpaper bought and stored for the entire house. The gardens that once circled the house were torn down and turned into farmland, and Hannibal wants to get the house back to a functioning homestead once more.

He has a few greenhouses slated to begin their construction in the spring, alongside a host of other needed buildings. Several barns, coops, sheds, and whatever else Hannibal could think of. Everything was planned out, down to the finer details. Will would be a liar if he said he wasn't impressed.

Sitting on the covered wrapped around deck overlooking the back yard, Will eyed the roped off areas where buildings would go. His mind was scattering itself between what other projects would need to be done. While Hannibal's plans were thorough, Will had hands on knowledge of things he should add to make his life easier in the long run. Hannibal took note of it all, finding he rather enjoyed hearing Will's input. Books could only go so far, and it was pleasant to have a working man's input.

"Should you write for your father?" Hannibal asks as he looks out over the homestead.

Will shakes his head, "He said he'd send word through to the post master here when he ended up somewhere. I'll send word back to him whenever he sends word."

Hannibal nods, musing over how inconvenient it must be to not know exactly where a family member is. If something were to happen, how would Will inform his father or vice versa. Though with Will's gift, he'd no doubt know if the worst were to happen. As long as his father didn't suddenly show up for him, his father was alive. It was more for Will's father to live without being sure, though perhaps they have a fail safe for if it were. A sign or something for his father to look for.

"Would you like to take up work here, then?" Hannibal asks as he stands to grab wine out of the ice bucket. He pours them each a glass, and Will accepts the glass.

Musing over the lightly swirled liquid as he smells it, he then answers. "I think I'll take up the workload you're offering," he takes a sip of wine, finding he rather enjoys the flavor.

"Glad to hear it," Hannibal smiles as he sits down as well. "Do you require room and board? I have plenty of space, or you're welcome to make your own place in the woods near my lake." He gives Will an amused side eye, knowing full well that Will still had a camp set up on a hill near the bank.

Sheepishly, Will looks away from Hannibal. "I'll admit I'm partial to the lake, but I think work would go smoother close to the house."

Hannibal hummed for a moment then offered, "That is true…"

They spent the rest of the night sipping wine and talking. Rare is putting it lightly for the way Will feels around Hannibal, it's comfortable and nice. By the end of it, they had made each

other aware of their designation as well. As an alpha, Hannibal understood that his presence could effect Will. As an omega, Will understood his own presence could effect Hannibal as well. As part of the working package, both men agreed to wear scent blockers when they'd be in close quarters. Much as they had today.

Plans had also been drawn to have a cabin built for Will in the spring, before the other buildings were to be completed. They both came to the conclusion that Will needed a place to spend his heats as well as wait out Hannibal's ruts. Over time as well, should Will find a mate, the cabin would serve as his own house. They even discussed what should be done should either man find themselves romantically inclined toward the other, and it was agreed Will would go to the cabin.

It was pleasant to be able to talk so much out for the both of them, and they were also both aware of their own biology. As both of them were unmated, it was more likely their instincts would try to push them together after repeated, long term exposure. Space was a sure fire way to see if the feelings would calm, or if they were true. While neither man planned on courting the other, planning beforehand never hurt. Especially when they were establishing a long term, possibly permanent, working relationship.

The following spring was a flurry of activity after a stagnant but productive Winter. Much of the wood work that could be sanded and stained was completed, and Hannibal was extremely pleased with the progress. Quite a bit of the flooring was changed out that needed to be as well, and Will often worked throughout the night on the house. With Will there, woodland spirits also began to frequent the house, and their presence definitely sped work along.

When the daffodils and tulips were blooming in town, Will finally had to step back for a little bit from his work. The cabin wasn't completed, so he had to rent a heat room from the inn in town. When Hannibal noticed that several of his blankets were taken, he didn't say anything. Nor did he comment when Will said nothing about it, just laundered them and put them back.

Working again, Will put a tent outside when Hannibal's rut came a few days after Will returned. Will tried to get a room again, but Hannibal insisted he could be outside the house safely. Occasionally, he would see Hannibal watching him put fence posts in, but that was as far as it went. Just as Will took some of Hannibal's blankets for security, Hannibal's instincts calmed knowing the omega they saw as under his care was safe and healthy. Will's inner omega definitely preened at being eyed by an alpha in rut, but neither acted upon it. Holding true to their agreement.

As summer rolled in with hotter temperatures, the two spent more time out on the back deck. Wine was often shared after a long day's work, and Will was settling into the pattern smoothly. Finding comfort himself, Hannibal couldn't deny how content it was to coexist alongside Will.

It was edging into Fall when scent blockers suddenly became hard to find. Newspapers were soon reporting of some religious group setting fire to warehouses. Even in their small town, political views were beginning to tide towards being against scent blockers. As winter came around, unmated omegas were being treated as filthy beings. The undercurrent of hate had

always been there, but people were much more vocal now that “traditional lives” were being pushed so hard. It was “unnatural” for an omega to not be mated.

Even the little town that Will found himself welcomed in was beginning to treat him differently. Perhaps due to his proximity to Hannibal, a man both feared and admired in equal sums, Will was spared the brunt. But that didn’t last long when people remembered he was just a laborer. Suddenly he wasn’t allowed at the woodworking shop to rent tools, and the owner claimed it because unmated omegas were too fickle to be trusted. Despite over a year of Will regularly doing his work there. At the stock yards where he went to get animals for Hannibal’s homestead, he was turned away. Told that his scent was a bad influence on alphas, and that if he came again it wasn’t their fault for whatever happened.

When his next heat was due in the spring, Will had a bad feeling. He asked Hannibal to walk with him to the cabin, and it was a good thing he did. A local farmhand was waiting for Will, and held a letter from the sheriff saying he had permission. Apparently it was an outdated law that was being taken advantage of now, and Will was fair game so long as he was in heat. The farmhand left that day alive, but he was definitely on Hannibal’s list now. He got Will back to the house, but his body was already in the process of breaking the heat without being told to.

“Hannibal,” Will seethes through gritted teeth. The almost burning scent wafting off Will was all Hannibal needed to know what was happening.

“What do you need?” Hannibal asks, eyes lingering all over Will who had smelled so good several hours ago.

“Can I stay in your bedroom until it breaks?” Will asks, grunting as cramps rack his body over the coals of a lost heat. He’s already leaning on Hannibal heavily, huffing his scent as he fights to stand.

“Of course,” Hannibal tries to purr despite how much the sight worries him to see. “Would you like me to comfort you?”

Pain rakes over Will’s body and the scent is like acid to Hannibal’s nose, but he would put up with it in a heart beat to help Will. Understanding without having to ask about it, Will nods, “Can you just hold me?”

The way he sound so small as his uterus contracts and his body continues to send out enough stress hormone to cancel the heat breaks at Hannibal’s heart. Purring, he gently starts to guide Will to the master bedroom. Looking every bit the frail omega that bastards demonize omegas as, Will whines in pain. Hannibal’s scent is only a small comfort to the man, and he desperately wishes he could help Will more.

Once they’re laying down with Will cradled into his chest, Hannibal reaches a tentative hand to gently rub the scenting glands on Will’s neck. Instead of smelling of burnt hair, the scent calms slightly. For the rest of the day, they lay like that until Will finally relaxes into Hannibal’s arms. He wraps his own arms around Hannibal, and neither man will ever talk about the way Will sobs into his chest ever again.

The following week, Hannibal and Will walked into the livestock yard together. They sat down without much issue, and Hannibal chose seats where he could hide Will against the wall. More out of fear of Hannibal, which still hasn't been fully explained to Will, no one bothers them. They do end up having to pay top dollar as people try to outbid them once they realize Will is telling Hannibal what to bid on. Thankfully that's the only issue until they're loading their livestock into the back of a large trailer hitched to a truck. Rare, but Hannibal had splurged to make the trip easier. The show of wealth, especially this kind of wealth after the war devastated everyone, did wonders to make the townsfolk back off of Hannibal.

Back home, Will couldn't help his excitement as they got the calves into their pens. While he was excited over the goats and sheep, he had worked on a dairy farm once and already had a love for calves. They were like giant puppies once you got then friendly, and he was thrilled Hannibal was letting him raise up their cattle. Bags of milk replacer were waiting already, and Will wasted no time in getting the ten calves they got fed. Most all of them took a few tries to get going, but then they eagerly fed even after the bottles were placed in holders.

"Will," Hannibal calls out before approaching.

Smiling widely for the first time since his body broke the heat, Will turns to Hannibal, "Hannibal?"

"I'll be out," Hannibal lets him know, and Will is immediately aware the freezer will be full soon.

"Be safe," Will nods, eyeing him for any signs he might need help. "If anyone comes, you're helping me?"

"Resting in my bedroom," Hannibal smiles and Will sees his eyes flick white again. This time seems deliberate… as though making sure Will sees and not just glimpsing because of his gift. "Keep the spirits near. I fear certain folk think your heat is just delaying."

"If anything happens," Will starts.

"It was self defense and the spirits," Hannibal spoke to the room loudly, "Will take care of it."

There was a buzzing in the room, and, while Will didn't see anything, he could feel it. Energy reverberated in the room, covering and smothering before pulling back to a safe distance. Nodding, Will speaks again. "Don't get caught."

"I never do," Hannibal turns and walks out of the barn. Without having to check, Will knows Hannibal has already disappeared. It's the telltale electrical feeling in the air, like after a lightning strike.

After the calves have finished drinking, Will picks up all the bottles and puts them in his carry bag. Walking outside, he hangs the bag on a hook and goes to bother the goats. The goats are skittish, as to be expected for being in a new environment, and the sheep are much the same. He walks back to the calf barn and grabs his bag, then back up to the house.

Whistling, he pulls a chair over near the sink and sets the bag of bottles on it. He runs water in a large pot, then sets it on the stove to boil. While waiting for the water to boil, he cleans out all the bottles and sanitizes them. All of the nipples are cleaned out, as well as the rings to hold them to the bottle. By the time he's done with his thorough cleaning, the water is boiling. Three bottles fit at a time, and the last bottle is boiled with the lids and nipples. All of it is then set out to dry on a sanitized rack, and Will pours himself a glass of whiskey.

While he does drink a lot more wine than he used to, he finds he prefers to be in Hannibal's company when he does. Somehow the wine doesn't feel as lavish when it isn't shared the man that Will is certain isn't fully human if human at all. Walking back out to the barn with his whiskey glass in hand, Will sips on it as he checks over the calves. He's expecting some of them to get the runs from their ordeal. It's got to be stressful, being a couple days old and already sold off. Sure the auctioneer claims they all got colostrum from their mothers, but he imagines they'd be much happier with their mamas.

After watching the calves for a while, Will heads back into the house with an empty glass. He refills it again, then sits on the porch and watches the sun set behind the trees… trees that he swear he sees something tall and black moving between them just on the edge. He rubs his eyes with his free hand, then looks again. Nothing. He assumes he must still just be exhausted after having his heat break and ignores it.

After the sun has long since set, Will is awoke from where he dozed on the couch. Hannibal is walking through the door, and he has a duffle bag in each hand. Quickly standing, Will takes one of the duffle bags and smiles at Hannibal who has completely white eyes still. When he blinks, his eyes are back to his usual amber red, "Hello, Will."

"Hello, Hannibal," Will raises an eyebrow, very aware that Hannibal was showing him his eyes on purpose. "Welcome home."

A pleased note hits Hannibal's scent, and Will instinctively mirrors it, happy. "I've brought home some select cuts."

Heating the duffle bag and raising an eyebrow at Hannibal, "Doesn't feel very selective."

"I assure you," Hannibal, still running high off adrenaline and victory, leans down to put his forehead against Will's. Purring, he continues, "It was very selective."

Loosened up from the liquor, Will purrs back, "Oh? Will I be reading about something 'shocking' in the paper in a few days?"

"Very," Hannibal rumbles pleased and very content. "Would you like to help me put it all away?"

"With pleasure," Will shifts so he can rub his cheek against Hannibal's. Hannibal puts a hand on Will's cheek, and the hand feels like the fingers are longer than they should be and more claw like. Trusting, Will leans more into the hand and let's Hannibal scent him back.

After some gentle but intimate scenting, the two move into the kitchen and begin to break down the primal cuts into the pieces they're supposed to be. Since Will's hands are a bit more

relaxed, he becomes the vacuum sealer. With nimble knife work, Hannibal makes quick work of both duffle bags. Will refuses to slow him to help with his half of the work, and patiently works through the rest of the meat.

“Hannibal,” Will asks carefully, and Hannibal can tell he’s about to broach a topic. “Were you running on the wood line today?”

“Can I ask why?” Hannibal asks, eyes tight and subtly moving closer to the knife.

“I thought I saw something running at the wood’s edge,” Will answers and continues to work. “It was very tall.”

“How did you feel about it?” Hannibal asks again.

Abandoning his work and turning to face Hannibal, Will is very sincere and Hannibal can see no trace of subversion. “I don’t know, but I’d feel a lot better if it was you.”

“It was me,” Hannibal answers, keeping Will’s eye contact.

“You don’t have to show anything you don’t want to,” Will walks up to Hannibal and places a hand on his cheek. “Just… don’t leave me.”

Placing a hand over Will’s, Hannibal nods, “I don’t plan on it.”

Sharing a small smile, Will rubs Hannibal’s cheek and purrs softly. On a certain level, Hannibal knows Will is only being so touchy because of having to break his heat. But the touch starved part of his tired soul just wants Will to always be like this so badly. Will is also aware if it, but the feel of Hannibal is just so much like home. Especially after everything that’s happened… maybe Will can convince himself that Hannibal isn’t just going along with this to pity him.

Chapter 2

Calves grew, as they always do, and eventually the soft touches and scenting between Hannibal and Will evened out. Both men drank noticeably less around each other, and Will hasn't seen the tall, dark figure running in the woods since. They weren't avoiding each other, but there was always a distance now. Neither man sure of the other now that enough time had passed they couldn't rationalize it away as Will needing comfort.

By the time autumn was coming around again, the calves were running with Will in the field. Not ashamed of himself, Hannibal openly watched Will as he ran with them. The calves bucked and kicked playfully, occasionally knocking Will when they got too excited. Thankfully Will was quick enough to dodge or only get hit in the arm. Though the hits were enough to make him baby the arm for a week after, work progressing much slower for it. Considering the danger that comes with raising calves, Will just made sure to disengage if they began bucking near him. He became very adept at jumping fences, and the calves soon took note. Their play buddy left if they bucked near him, so they began running away from their play buddy if they got too excited.

In town, Will found himself less welcome without the presence of Hannibal. Some of the older ladies at the farmers' market still welcomed him, but they did so in quiet voices and hushed tones. He quit going to the grocery store alone after a "well meaning" church goer gave him a pamphlet about how omegas need the hand of an alpha… it got old after a month, and Hannibal didn't blame him. The townsfolk were getting louder about their new religious and political views… or perhaps they always had them… only now they felt comfortable, emboldened by a pack mentality, to voice it.

The townsfolk were still buzzing over how seven alphas were slain by some spirit of the land. Some had connected the fact they were going to visit Will, and it certainly didn't help the dark looks he got. It was almost a challenge now, for the town that was growing in size with new folk looking to escape city centers. Will was seen as an omega protected by the spirits of land. Of course the alphas were murdered by spirits, so that meant Will was a powerful witch. What alpha wouldn't want a witch that powerful as their mate? The prestige was worth the risk, and the more Will secluded himself… the more the townsfolk felt the rumors were true.

More and more, Will withdrew himself until Hannibal was making all the runs to town. He didn't enjoy going out, when he could feel the thoughts people had about him. Customer service smiles hid questions of his lineage or downright awful ideas on how to pin him down, claim him. Everyone knew where his cabin was now, and the inn no longer offered heat rooms he trusted the locks on. He gleamed the fact that multiple alphas had keys from the inn owner when he inquired about a room for the spring over the winter.

Hannibal couldn't find it in himself to regret the fact all of it drove Will closer to him. He still voiced his opinion and shut down anyone who tried to rope him into their shifty talks filled with religious zeal and oppression. In town, he was one of the few people who still talked loudly about how wrong what people were doing was. It caused more than one scuffle, but Hannibal never back down or lost. Perhaps it was his mostly concealed desperation in his

protection of Will and holding of his views that made Will ignore the manipulative tone Hannibal's intents towards him got. At least Hannibal treated him as an equal in a town full of people that were quickly radicalized.

When the daffodils and tulips began to get ready to bloom in town, Will felt his body getting into gear for another heat. He hesitantly began to worry if he'd have to let himself break another heat. His cabin was off limits, and he didn't want to push the boundaries too hard with Hannibal. Though they were in their third year of cohabitation, and maybe that meant something… maybe Hannibal would be open to becoming a pair to make everything easier.

At dinner that night, Will carefully broached the topic, "Hannibal, my heat is coming and I'm uncomfortable using the inn or the cabin."

Eating the piece of meat speared on his fork, Hannibal bought himself some time to think. He was thankful they put charms up so Will couldn't feel his thoughts within the confines of the home's walls. "I can stay outside, keep an eye on things." Unspoken went the fact Hannibal would be defending Will from usurpers.

"A lot of our problems would be solved if we spent my heat together and became a pair," Will offered, looking straight at Hannibal.

The seriousness in his gaze gave Hannibal pause, and he swallowed thickly. Barely containing the purr at the suggestion, Hannibal pushed his instincts aside for his own thoughts. "While I agree with your train thought of heavily," he began and Will looked down at his plate. Unwilling to see Hannibal's face as Will assured himself he'd be rejected thoroughly but politely. "I would prefer the choice be made of want and not necessity. I'd like to court you before."

"Haven't you already?" Will asks, eyebrow raised as he looks back up to Hannibal.

"No, I've done purely what I wanted and paid you a working wage," Hannibal answers and sets down his silverware to give Will his full attention. "I'd like a traditional courting period after your heat."

Remembering their conversations from when he first moved in, Will reminds him, "The cabin isn't safe. How are we going to have a traditional courting period?"

"I want you to move into the quarters set aside for the omega of the house," Hannibal answers easily. "It has everything you'd need, including a nesting room."

"Are you sure you want me to?" Will asks again, wanting more confirmation from Hannibal. He's already agreeing mentally, wanting to jump onto the new boat presented.

"Yes," Hannibal nods immediately, then continues. "I would also like to offer you a more… traditional courting. I will present you with the courting necklace my father presented my mother, as it's passed from first born alpha to first born alpha. While it very much resembles the collars made popular today, I think you'll find it more appealing."

“You wish for me to allow you to collar me and hold the key to take it off my neck?” Will asks, more than a little put off at that idea despite the trust.

“No,” Hannibal shakes his head with a small laugh. “Of course not, Will. You will hold the key with you, as, traditionally, the necklaces were locked to symbolize the omega’s hold over the courting alpha. It can removed at any point, and, if not worn publicly, shows that the omega has rejected the alpha.”

“What would be considered publicly?” Will asks, more relaxed at Hannibal’s prospect now.

Relaxing as Will does, Hannibal continues with less tension in his shoulders. “For us, since we live together, it would be considered any time you leave your quarters.”

“Okay,” Will nods and then his eyes dart off to the side awkwardly. “I have a couple of things my dad taught me for courting.”

Absolutely delighted that Will wants to engage in the courtship as well, Hannibal waits for Will to speak again after he nods. Clearing his throat, Will then continues, “Dad said it was tradition in his village for omegas to give an alpha they wanted to court seriously a blanket from their nest after a heat. The alpha would then give a blanket from their nest after a rut, and it was to see if the pair could pull a mating cycle out in each other.”

“Our cycles seem to match up if our first spring together shows anything,” Hannibal adds carefully. “I’m afraid it would be mostly seeing if you get another heat from me.”

Very apparent he never expected to have to actually talk about this, Will takes a moment to respond. “Dad said it would make a scheduled rut much… heavier.”

Hannibal raises his eyebrows slightly, “Oh.”

“Yeah,” Will won’t look Hannibal in the eyes. “And this was done before flower crowns were exchanged.”

“Flower crowns?” Hannibal asks, genuinely intrigued.

“Magic ran heavy in the swamp their village was in,” Will offers up before explaining. “The spirits would let the flower crowns die if they thought the pair was a bad match. However, the crowns would continue to grow if the spirits thought it was a good match. They would then plant the crowns the autumn before a planned coupling. The crowns would make a bush and bloom all winter if the spirits of the land gave their blessing.”

“How often are the crowns worn?” Hannibal asks, genuinely curious.

“You don’t take them off, sleeping in them won’t hurt it if it’s meant to be,” Will answers, then adds. “It used to be common place for nonhuman and human to court each other and mate. The crown won’t get hurt by any physical changes you can make, but it’ll stay in place.”

Picking up the warning he’s being given, Hannibal nods. It means no witnesses can be left behind if someone sees him hunting. Hannibal then asks, “Where are the crowns planted?”

“Against the house,” Will answers and his ears go red, continuing to not make eye contact again. “In very rare cases, the bush grows into a room for the pair to spend heats and ruts in. If one grew, it was also customary to give birth to pups within in the room. Only the alpha, omega, and their children can enter, and it’s said the spirits assist in the birth. The spirits also bind the souls so the pair lives the same amount of time.”

Hannibal can easily imagine a young Will hoping such a room grew for him, and it brings a smile to his face. “I think that’s very lovely, perhaps one will grow for us.”

Very quiet, Will agrees, “Me too.”

“When was the last time one grew?” Hannibal asks, genuinely curious.

“My great grandparents,” Will answers and looks to Hannibal again, eyes full of hope like they haven’t been in a long time. “It’s happened more frequently in my lineage than others from that village.”

“Perhaps we can have high hopes,” Hannibal beams back.

“I think its reasonable to,” Will answers, looking Hannibal in the eyes still. There’s a warmth blooming between the two, and Will isn’t even aware they’ve both begun to purr in the silence that falls. He only notes its absence when he speaks again. “Can I ask how long of a life I should expect if the spirits make a room?”

Swallowing before answering, Hannibal speaks softly, “Long enough that I have only ever heard of my kind dying by someone else’s hand. If it goes by the longest life.”

“It does,” Will answers, breath almost shaky. “My great grandpa is a vampire.”

“A vampire had children?” Hannibal asks, raising an eyebrow and eyeing Will. There were no tales of vampiric children being born, and there were no tales of a vampire being fertile.

“The vampire bit didn’t pass down,” Will informs with a shrugs. “At least not in the way you’d expect. We can all go out in daylight and the like, obviously. Our magic is just stronger when human flesh or blood is consumed. But the strength of the traits have held strong even as the relation proximity diminishes.

“That would explain having familial dishes that go with my tastes,” Hannibal smiles easily. “Is there anything else that you would like to do in regards to courting traditions?”

Will quiets again before taking a deep breath, thinking back to a handful of years spent in a very spiritual village before the war broke out. “My great grandfather used to say that an alpha worth mating should be able to find their chosen omega with their nose plugged with herbs. That any alpha that can’t do that doesn’t deserve a full bond.”

“And when would this happen?” Hannibal asks, genuinely curious and slightly wary. He was certain he could find Will anywhere by scent, but he was uncertain if he could without.

“Autumn, during the Spirit Lights Festival,” Will answers and is genuinely surprised he remembered it so clearly. Visions of being a small boy watching young adults search for their

partners. Of making paper lanterns and hanging them for souls to go in and glow. Lighting candles up and down pathways until they melted into one another and more were placed on top. “At the end of the festival is when you bury the crowns if the alpha found their omega.”

“That’s fascinating,” Hannibal stated simply, and Will nodded. His mind was in a different time, from before the war. It was all so clear and beautiful, and he relished in the scent memories of a village he would never find again. Of a life he would never have again. Of simple means and having nothing, yet not wanting for anything out of reach.

“I’m assuming you have some other customs you’d like to do?” Will asks, taking the focus off of his own courting knowledge.

“Most of the customs I want to do are along the lines of gift giving and scenting,” Hannibal admits. “Omegan customs were taught to my younger sister, Mischa. Unfortunately, those lessons are lost to time. Your honest reactions are all I require.”

“We’re really doing this?” Will asks softly and feels a familiar, blooming warmth building in his core. His scent getting a softness to it and moving from scents of the woods and stream to visions of honeysuckles growing along a creek bank.

“Only with your express permission, I assure you,” Hannibal smiles and absolutely soaks up the subtle changing of Will’s scent in reaction to him. “Let’s make it official after your heat and my rut.”

Definitely tipping into his official preheat a little early, Will eyes Hannibal, “Would you like to offer me any nesting materials? Consider it a trial run?”

Purring loudly in response, Hannibal stands, “I’d love to.” His own scent is definitely beginning to tip towards an impending rut in response to Will, but there’s no haze of the mind yet.

“Is helping me build my nest against any courting customs?” Will stands as well and walks over to join Hannibal. The switch may feel sudden, but both men had been waiting so long for the other to take the first step.

“So long as you allow me to drop my glamour, it’s fine.” Hannibal answers softly, looking down at Will. He’s offering to let Will truly see him, and he’s not sure what he’ll do if Will denies him. For a moment he thinks Will is rejecting him, until he sees realization dawning across Will’s features.

“Please,” Will answers breathlessly, “Hannibal, please.” He takes Hannibal’s hands in his own, smiling up at him. “I’d really like that.”

Gripping Will’s hands tightly, Hannibal takes a slow breath and let’s his person suit drop. The same electrically charged air spikes for a moment, then fades away. Void black hands with long, claw like fingers hold onto Will’s hands. A tall, hulking form with large, void black antlers sprouting from its head stares down at Will with almost pearlescent milk white eyes. It’s features are still distinctly Hannibal, and he leans down so his head is at the same level his human form’s is.

Squeezing Hannibal's hands for a moment, Will then places his hands on either side of Hannibal's face. "Hannibal," his voice is awestruck as he recognizes what Hannibal is. "Thank you." He pulls Hannibal's face closer and leans up so he can give him a chaste kiss. "Will you show me the nesting materials you prepared in my quarters?"

Making a chittering purr that would stop many in their tracks, Hannibal leans down. Nuzzling his cheek against Will's to scent him, it's beyond obvious he wants to. Reaching his arms down and around Will, he's carefully hoisted up against Hannibal's chest. It ticks in Will's brain that the large, grand doorways made much more sense. They definitely weren't just for looks, and Hannibal easily carried Will to the omega quarters.

The entry way was well protected with a hidden door that only Hannibal and Will knew about. Will only knew because he had fixed the rooms up to Hannibal's standard that first winter. Then he was promptly made aware that Hannibal had other projects he wanted Will to work on. He hasn't been inside since that first Winter, and the sight he saw once the hidden door opened was very familiar. His cabin. The cabin Hannibal had built. How did he not realize they were the same layout but minus a couple rooms?

How long had Hannibal been planning on courting him? Will had entertained thoughts of possibly mating with Hannibal, but he had always assured himself he wouldn't get the chance. Yet, here in the omega quarters of the grand Lecter estate, was an entire suite dedicated to Will's tastes over Hannibal's. Rustic furniture that matched exactly what Will had in the cabin, but not worn whatsoever… as Will had been filling his cabin, Hannibal had been secretly buying replicas of the furniture and placing them in the quarters unnoticed. There were some additions, such as a closet full of soft fabric items. This large, walk in closet is where Hannibal set Will down to revert back to his human form.

"I've been procuring a large selection for you to choose from," Hannibal smiles at Will, who's brain was still playing catch up. "I've known you were coming for a long time."

"Known I was coming?" Will asks as he picks up a flannel patterned blanket and can scent Hannibal heavily on it. The entire room smelled of Hannibal… all of these blankets, while not used in rut, had been used by Hannibal for at least a night before going on a shelf. "I believe you've said something like that before." Will didn't hesitate to shamelessly keep a hold on the blanket close to his face.

"It is not unheard of for my kind to know roughly when they'll meet their destined mate," Hannibal answered confidently. "Though I had no clue you would knock on my door and look for work." His pupils are blown out as he takes in Will holding the blanket close. Forearms flexing with the intensity of his grip, ready to fight anyone who dared take it from his hands.

"I suppose we will get that crown room," Will laughs light heartedly though the feeling of slick starting to form makes him freeze slightly.

"I believe you know this lay out well enough," Hannibal is breathing through his mouth as he looks at Will. He can scent the beginnings of heavy heat blossoming from Will. "Before we move too quickly, I will see my way out."

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal's rut ended up coming on strong about the same time as Will's heat. A neighbor ended up getting hired to take care of the livestock while they were indisposed, and the hired hand quickly went back to town with what he saw. From his perspective, Will and Hannibal were sharing a mating cycle. Some in town scoffed due to there being no formal announcement of courtship, but others were happy to hear it. Mostly their happiness came from pushing Will to make a decision on mating, and for the mostly mysterious alpha to have a weak point now. Something that some felt they could use over the alpha to get their way. Completely forgotten went the fact Will was sturdy and could handle himself extremely well. His years of hard labor weren't something anyone should blink at, but what could be blinked at if it was forgotten entirely?

At the end of their respective cycles, they both met in the kitchen. Will was gripping the blanket he had picked up when Hannibal was there, and Hannibal was holding a velvety comforter. Both immediately had to excuse themselves after the exchange, the scents pulling them back into a new cycle almost immediately. The hired hand stayed on for another week and a half, and rumors flared in town like a roaring fire. There's no way they wouldn't see Will without a mating bite!

Only the old women from the farmer's market spoke in hushed tones about old customs that used to occur. They spoke about exchanging parts of the nest to test compatibility, and they whispered excitedly about seeing what collar Will might wear. Dreamily, they hoped it would be an old fashion one where the omega held onto the key. It was years out of date, but it didn't stop them from hoping. Hannibal seemed so old fashioned… perhaps he would treat the hardworking omega right. If he was that type of alpha, perhaps he'd lead by example for what courting actually looks like for the younger folk.

When the fresh round of heat and rut were over, Hannibal dismissed the hired hand. When Hannibal's scent wasn't changed at all, the hired hand ran back to town with more gossip. The older women's hopes were much higher, and new speculation swept through the bigoted folks. Now everyone wanted to know what the hell happened, and more bets were placed upon who could get Will. Meanwhile, Will and Hannibal stayed at the house and let themselves relax a week before starting anymore courting talk. Post heat or rut exhaustion was very real, and they figured it best to wait until they were more sound of mind.

The collar in Hannibal's hand was more elaborate than Will expected. It would comfortably cover his entire neck, and it would drape down his front as well. For lack of something better to compare it to, Will was reminded of a dickey collar without a back part. Instead of being solid, as Will imagined, it was ornately beaded and strung together. The main gem of choice was fire opal, and there were several sizeable specimens weaved in. Upon closer inspection, Will realized the thread sized metal was extremely small and intricate chain mail. The ornate weaving of metal threads was all done in chain mail… yet the piece itself wasn't overly

heavy. When he touched it, he could feel something almost… reach back? Not quite intelligence, but definitely awareness.

“This opal,” Hannibal pointed at the largest one in the middle that would sit very comfortable at the base of his neck. “Can be removed but only by an omega’s hand.”

Gingerly, Will removed the large stone and it felt warm. Eyes wide, Will watched as the large stone became a swirling blue color. It had a faint glow to it, and it took some time before it began to look like a river was running through it. Within the once opal, a river now ran through with the occasional dark spot of a fish or floating debris. Looking to the collar again, he could see that all of the stones now held rivers… as though it were one connected river shown through different stones. It was… amazing. River’s cold now radiated off the stone, and it was relaxing to hold. He could feel the movement of the water against his palm, and he lost himself in the feeling for some time.

When asked by Hannibal if he could place the collar, Will nodded as he met his gaze. Unbuttoning his shirt, Will pulled the flannel so Hannibal could place it over his grey undershirt. On his own, he would switch it so it sat comfortably against his skin. The sensation of water moving carried to the metal, and Will purred. The metal knitted itself back together on its own when the stone in his hand was placed back into place. What was once loose now became form fit. It felt like an extension of himself already, and Will looked back to Hannibal again.

“Does it have to come off?”

“No.” Hannibal smiles, extremely pleased that Will enjoys the collar so much.

Buttoning his shirt back up, Will smiles back warmly. “Want to go pick or buy some flowers for the crowns?”

“I’d enjoy that,” Hannibal purrs. “Want to go buy some? I’m afraid we’ve been so focused on other matters that our gardens are severely lacking.”

Purring back, Will nods, “I’d really like that.”

The two set off for town after getting everything they needed done around the homestead. It was a pleasant ride, and their arrival at the florist shop didn’t go unnoticed. The woman behind the counter was a younger alpha, and she eyed the collar around Will’s neck with a raised eyebrow. “Are congratulations in order?”

Tensing beside Hannibal, Will looked over to the woman’s direction. “Just our courtship.”

“Finally fulfilling your natural role,” She smiled and it was genuine. There was no malice in her voice, she genuinely believed an omega was only worth anything if they followed backwards logics. “I’m glad to see you’ve chosen a worthwhile mate.”

Mild surprise was putting it lightly for the fact she seemed to think Will had a right to choose despite buying into the shittier propaganda. “There’s no natural roles at play,” Hannibal answered coldly. “Simply attraction and compatibility of the mind and heart.”

“Of course,” the woman laughed lightly, not picking up on how close she was to going into Hannibal’s rolodex. “We have some fresh flowers in from the greenhouses a few counties over, they have a spirit seal that guarantees them for a month.” She gestures at a glass case with a lock on it. “If you see something you’d like, just let me know.”

Ignoring her already, Will walked passed the spirit sealed flowers to the locally cut. There was an array of daffodils, tulips, hyacinth, and columbine. His dad said the flowers would feel right, but none that he looked at made him feel anything. One glance at Hannibal confirmed he didn’t feel anything about it either… Will sighed and looked up at Hannibal, “Maybe we can visit Farmer Brown? She has a nice garden, and she’s told me to come by if I needed any before.”

“Farmer Brown?” Hannibal asked with a curious look. “The cattle farmer with the chickens?”

“Yeah,” Will nodded and felt something clicking in his gut… something that felt closer to right than being here.

“Hopefully she won’t mind a surprise visit,” Hannibal chuckles and puts a hand on Will’s back to soothe tension Will was unaware he was building.

“If we bring her some coffee beans you had brought in,” Will looks back up at Hannibal, “I’m sure she’ll overlook us butchering all her cattle if we did.”

“Our home is on the way,” Hannibal muses with a small grin. “Does her partner have anything he likes?”

“It would be wise to only bring something for her, given she’s the one we will be doing business with.” Will informs with a teasing grin. “She’s very… interesting. Strong willed. Doesn’t like people thinking they have to appease her alpha to do business with her.”

“Smart woman,” Hannibal grins and starts to lead Will out of the store. The clerk doesn’t say anything, and they don’t bother to waste their breath with pleasantries either.

By the time they got to Farmer Brown’s home, the sun was high in the sky but pushing toward the afternoon. They were greeted by the short woman with long white hair coming out of her home with a shotgun and a hard expression. Lowering the gun but not setting it aside, she waved and walked out to greet them. “Long time, no see.”

Her warm voice had a rasp to it from age, and it relaxed a piece of Will he didn’t know was wound. Looking her directly in the face, Will could tell she was curious about the courting necklace but in an entirely positive way. She was glad her thoughts on Hannibal were proven right and Will was in good hands. It eased a worry Will wasn’t aware of that he would gleam something more negative, but Farmer Brown wasn’t like that to begin with.

“We’ve been busy,” Will now approached her with Hannibal beside him. She met them just off the porch in the grass, and her eyes kept scanning the area.

“I can see that,” she smirked more so at Hannibal than Will. “Are congratulations in order?”

“I believe so,” Hannibal almost purred, putting a hand on Will’s lower back casually. “I’ve been given the great and rare gift of being able to court Will.”

“Remember that,” Farmer Brown stared Hannibal straight in the eyes, and Will saw that she knew a lot more about Hannibal than she let on. “I know your family very well. Don’t make me call them.”

Not offended in the least, Hannibal’s smile widened minimally. “You’ll have no reason to. I promise.”

“Good. Now what do you boys need?” Farmer Brown asked, eyes scanning behind them again. Whatever it was that she was looking for was lost to Will’s gift, and Hannibal seemed to be staring rather closely as well.

“We were hoping you’d let us take some flowers to make crowns for our courting,” Will answered with a more forced smile as he began to subtly case their surroundings. The land here usually greeted him by now, but it was completely silent… silence from spirits were never good.

Before she could answer, Hannibal’s form was larger and pitch black. A resounding boom with a shockwave that blew Will and Brown’s hair let out before Will registered Hannibal’s loud growl. There was no time for reaction from the humans as Hannibal shrieked, the noise freezing both of them in place. Will managed to turn his head in time to see Hannibal tackle a large creature made of bone and rotten meat. Smoke was flowing from its mouth and eye sockets, and it reeked of rot and decay. The land was silent for a reason… it was hiding.

The growling was unlike anything Will or Brown had ever heard. It sounded as though thousands of growls were emanating from everywhere instead of just Hannibal. His usual scent of wine and perfectly roasted meat was replaced by the heavy scent of fresh blood and burning rubber. Foul and offending, a warning to anyone who smelled it. Yet it did nothing to the creature that managed to pin Hannibal against the ground and bash its forehead of thick bone repeatedly into his head. It must’ve dazed Hannibal, who shrieked again. This shriek had inhuman shrill notes like nails on a chalkboard with an undercurrent of a rumbling diesel engine.

Finally unfrozen, Will sucked in a breath of air and turned his entire body to face the scene before him. Farmer Brown seemed to quickly deduce that bullets would do nothing, so she looked to Will for a moment. As a witch, Will was the only of the pair that had a fighting chance in aiding Hannibal against the unholy beast. Mentally, he quickly opened himself up to the senses around him. He immediately made the mistake of staring into the rot’s eye socket, and was bombarded with the images of an unholy ritual performed on a boar… the creature was simply following the bindings of a master it despised… while he couldn’t save it, he could end its suffering.

“Hannibal, try to get away,” Will ordered as he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a small pouch of ash. He coated his hands in it and stood at the ready, and Hannibal struggled for several minutes before he was finally able to get out from under the beast. As soon as they weren’t connected, Will became the target. He had a mere second to get his spell cast before he was knocked onto the ground.

“Settle,” Will commanded and slapped both hands to the sides of the once boar’s head. “Return.” A top of himself, the creature began to disintegrate into black pearls that fell down onto Will.

Now back in his regular form, Hannibal limped his way over to Will. Farmer Brown stayed back for now, not wanting to interfere, especially between an alpha and omega. “Will, what are these?” Hannibal picked up one of the black pearls.

“The last gift a forcefully corrupted soul can give from a ruined body,” Will answers, staying laid out on the ground. He stares up at the sky, fighting back the sudden urge to sob. It wasn’t his own, but the boar’s soul was so strong in its presence still. “Eat one. They’re safe for your kind. You’ll heal up by tomorrow, too.”

“Obsidian soul pearls,” Hannibal blinks. “I thought they only had the chance to drop one?”

“If the soul was truly pure before it was corrupted and the soul is successfully pulled put before destruction,” Will starts before he sighs and closes his eyes, extending his arms and legs out like a star fish. “The entire body becomes pearls. It’s,” Will yawns widely. “A lot. Not easy,” Will yawns again, wider. “Not everyone can do it.”

Collecting the pearls one by one, Hannibal counts as he places each one into a small, leather bag he had in the car. As the omega laid in the grass, Hannibal and Farmer Brown could see an interesting sight from both their perspectives. Up close and without as strong a gift as Will, Hannibal could see the imprint in the grass where something laid. Far away and with a similar strength gift, Farmer Brown could see a wild boar with large tusks laying on the ground next Will. Will who couldn’t hold back anymore and cried silently, struck with the grief of the boar immensely.

The grief of a life, while longer than many wild boars, was cut so very short. He saw how this boar had a gift as well. He saw how the spirits interacted with this boar… how it seemed far too intelligent. It definitely had to be an after effect of the war. It wasn’t uncommon to see animals that formed legitimate tribes of sorts, communities with trade and more human like behaviors. This boar… he was a leader. A strong and wise soul that looked after his people with pride… even sacrificed himself when the men in black robes came for his small community.

Snout against Will’s face, the boar showed Will what memories he had of the black robed men. There were at least five that came to the grove with the old growth trees and natural small caves that acted as dens. The lake was intimately familiar with Will, and he knew this was near or on the Lecter estate. Whoever did this wanted this to happen at the house, but was unaware that the property counted as a lair for Hannibal. A wendigo’s lair was expansive, and the rotten form of that creature could sense it unwise to attack. However it did know somehow that Hannibal and Will would go to Farmer Brown’s… this boar had the gift of foresight and it stayed after it was turned.

This boar who defied the odds by staying around when it should’ve dissipated with the body was giving all the information it could. At the very least, Will was now duty bound to figure out who the black robed men were. He also felt a personal conviction to check in on the wild

boar tribe that was left. Turning his head to look at the spirit that gave this information and help so freely, Will spoke, “If I go to your home, will I find anyone there?”

The boar nodded and touched his snout against Will’s face again. It shows him another cave of sorts a little ways up stream, but still on Hannibal’s property. That’s where everyone went. Will needs to go there.

“Would you like to go with me?” Will asks, feeling the exhaustion pulling at his mind heavily. The boar somehow managed to look at Will like he was stupid, and Will took the hint. “You’re bound to me now. Of course you’re going with me.”

Then the world went dark for Will.

“How many of those pearls did you say Wilbur dropped when I pulled him out?” Will asks, absolutely dumbfounded.

“Counting the five that were in the SSS class that we ate,” Hannibal starts, looking closer to Will’s age now. “One hundred forty seven triple S class, nineteen double S class, three S class, one hundred twenty two triple A class, two hundred one double A class, and five hundred ninety four A class. Quite the high class sum, I’m very impressed with Wilbur.”

“One triple S class is considered astronomical odds,” Will laughs as he ghosts his hand over the top of Wilbur’s spectral head.

“Such a boar could only have been turned into that high a level of rot,” Hannibal muses with a cat like grin. Somehow, the spectral boar was able to consume a pearl. Will decided it was best to not think about that so much, and just be happy the soul bound boar was happy.

“Who named him Wilbur?” Will asks as he looks back over to take in the sight of a much younger Farmer Brown with long brown hair and a few lost inches back in her height.

“I did,” Farmer Brown laughs. “Your first soul companion needed a name to fully bind, and, well, you weren’t available.”

“Oh,” Will blinks and takes a sip of the coffee Brown had made for them. He was still reeling over the fact she seemed to have reverted back to her twenties or early thirties. Apparently her mate, Joe, had also eaten a pearl with similar effects. In his mind, he quickly recounted that Hannibal ate one, Wilbur ate one, Brown ate one, and Joe ate one… who ate the fifth?

When the back door opened and a younger versions of their two border collies bounced in along with Joe, Will knew then. The fifth pearl was split between the two dogs. What were two very aged dogs close to passing on, were now twelve years younger at least from their previous fifteen years. Idly, Will wondered how the town would react given only the obsidian soul pearls could manage such a thing… though Hannibal was wealthy enough they might just consider it a gift.

With Joe returned, they began to discuss more of what should be done with the pearls. There were some varying ideas, but everyone agreed it was best to hold onto them. Someone was dabbling in, possibly practicing, black magic. It was best to keep good cards close to your chest or up a sleeve. Brown and Joe were left with a bag full of the A class, as keeping anything more powerful could easily be sensed and make them a target. Rots were eternally hungry, and they would be drawn to the highest density of stored magic to power themselves up.

Hannibal and Will knew full well they were putting a giant target on their backs. Though they did so with full knowledge of the risks. Out of the two pairs, they were definitely better equipped to deal with rots. If things got too bad to handle, they also agreed to bring Brown and Joe to their homestead. It was much more convincing for Brown and Joe, and they only agreed reluctantly. However reluctantly the deal was made, Will felt much more comfortable knowing they would come without question… if the situation was dire.

“You two go pick yourselves some flowers now,” Brown smiled at the pair, once almost silver blue eyes now a youthful and vibrant sky blue shining brightly.

Putting an arm around Brown and smiling just as wide, Joe raised an eyebrow, “Show us those crowns when they start growing, too.”

The happiness was catchy, and Hannibal found himself unable to resist smiling just as fondly. “Thank you both.”

“No need to thank us,” Brown waved him off nonchalantly. “Just treat the boy right. I guarantee you won’t like the consequences.”

“At all,” Joe finished, still smiling as warmly as he had before.

“Of course,” Hannibal nodded, though the hairs on his neck threatened to raise at the promise.

Rolling his eyes in amusement, Will looked to the pair, “He won’t do anything I don’t want.” He felt Hannibal tense beside him, knowing Will could probably defend himself well enough.

Walking out the door to the floral gardens near the road felt like walking to a new destiny. If there was ever any chance of turning around, Will felt like making the crowns would end that for him. Unless the crowns died, of course. Yet he felt in his gut that was one of the most unlikely things to happen. Hannibal felt… he felt right. He felt like home. He felt like everything Will had been searching for without knowing. There weren’t any combination of words that could describe how he felt, really.

“Does it matter what we pick?” Hannibal asks as they both squat down to look at some crocuses that had sprung up and blew softly in the wind.

“Dad always said,” Will plucked a purple crocus with a soft expression on his face, “It would just feel right.” He places it in the crook of Hannibal’s ear where it meets his head, and then looks shocked when vines begin to form to hold it in place. “Oh.”

Feeling the vines begin to snake around his hair, Hannibal blinked at Will. It wasn't uncomfortable, but it was definitely something new. "I suppose the crowns shall craft themselves as we place the flowers in?"

"I guess so," Will answered, a faint blush dusting his cheeks.

"Perhaps we can add flowers as the seasons progress?" Hannibal offers up as he plucks a yellow crocus and places it on Will's ear with a smile that took Will's breath away.

"I don't know," Will admits and plucks a white crocus and adds it into Hannibal's crown. The vines continue to move and grow, easily affixing the flowers in place.

"Then we shall find out together, yes?" Hannibal plucks another yellow and places it on the other side.

"I'd like that," Will smiles back and places another white crocus in Hannibal's crown.

Keeping both sides even, Hannibal chose his flowers carefully. By the time they were done with crocuses, Will had a beautiful waving line of the dainty flowers. Placed carefully so the colors were the same with two white on either side of a blank space in the middle. Meanwhile, Will had been going more for a build up of the flowers near Hannibal's temples and down the back of his head. They swirled slightly out toward the top of his head, and it was quite wild and pleasant to look at.

"Hannibal," Will flushed slightly as he took in the alpha he was courting as much as being courted by.

"Yes?" He smiled and leaned in slightly, planning on chastely kissing the man once he finished speaking.

"Can I put flowers on your antlers?" Will asks and looks into his eyes, lips slightly parted and leaning ever so slightly closer to Hannibal.

"Of course, my dear," Hannibal purrs and closes the distance after Will closes his eyes. Their lips meet tenderly, and then Will feels them get cold. When he opens his eyes, he's staring into unblinking milk whites.

Pulling away, Will can't help the softness of his affections that displays so openly through his scent and expression. His eyes are warmer than usual, the lines on his face not as hard, and jaw not as clenched as its usual resting position. Dipping his head, Hannibal chitters softly at Will and waits for him to adorn his antlers in flowers. They're both surprised when Will's vines begin to grow to make identical antlers to Hannibal's. Once again, they begin to take turns placing flowers into each other's crowns. Slowly, daffodils and tulips are added in as well. When they've filled in enough that both of them feel confident, Hannibal shifts back to his human form. The antlers remain, now made of vine.

"I love you, Hannibal," Will confesses breathily, heart thumping hard. Feeling more like a teenager than a grown man, pink paints like watercolor the tips of Will's ears and cheek bones.

“I love you, too, Will,” Hannibal answers and cups his face to pull him into a less than chaste but just as tender kiss.

As spring begins to thaw more, the land begins to open up for more life. With Hannibal not allowing him to work anymore, the man drew up plans until the grounds were warm enough to work. Hired hands from Hannibal picked stones from the fields before a local farmer planted, and the stones were deposited near the house. Bags of masonry cement and other needed supplies were delivered to one of the barns from a local depot, and Will set to work. Despite wanting to help, Hannibal was strictly banned from anything beyond supplying Will with what he needed. In fact, they had their first argument over it.

“I don’t see why you’re so aversed to having my help,” Hannibal stated in a cool tone, amber eyes appraising Will. He waited a beat before continuing on, “You’d have a great deal less to do if you’d accept my aid.”

“It’s not about less work,” Will answered, tired and feeling a headache coming on. He pinched the bridge of his nose before looking back at Hannibal. “It’s about how I am making use of the gifts you gave me.”

“As a courting gift, giving you the option to make changes to the estate wasn’t supposed to entail you working yourself ragged,” Hannibal counters back quickly, showing how little he thought over Will’s words before answering.

A vein bulging in his temple, Will picked up his glass of wine and took a long swig to give himself time to calm down slightly. Glass set a little too hard on the table, Will cocks an eyebrow at Hannibal. “I like having projects. I like working with my hands. And it’s not your place to dictate how I make use of gifts!”

“As an alpha courting you-“

“As an alpha nothing! You’re courting me. I’m courting you. Man to man. Our designations have nothing to do with this!” Will snaps back and stands up from the table. “I realize you’re a fair deal older than me, but I hope you aren’t expecting an omega that whimpers and stays in their nest all day.”

“Will,” Hannibal stands as Will begins to march towards his quarters. “I wasn’t going to say anything like that.”

Gripping the panel to his quarters, Will turns to look at Hannibal coldly. “Is my liking your courting gifts not enough for you?”

“It is,” Hannibal answers immediately, frowning slightly at Will. His scent is marred with the displeasure and regret, and Will doesn’t show at all that he notices.

“Then act like it,” Will states gruffly before opening the door, walking in, and slamming it behind him hard enough to rattle the paintings on the wall.

It took Will several long days of Hannibal trying to appease him with gifts before he snapped a second time. Though he did thoroughly use the fact that he could reject said gifts to prove his point to Hannibal. He was not an omega that could be won over with gifts. Words spoken only to ease Hannibal's own guilt wouldn't ease Will's anger, only fuel it. It took a letter arriving in the mail from Beau, Will's dad, for Will to finally approach Hannibal of his own accord.

"Hannibal," Will was slightly pale and worried looking, his scent oozed anxiety that clung to every soft material and embedded itself. It had tinges of burnt sugar and pastries, so far from physical distress that it made Hannibal move towards Will before he was even called.

"Dad… he's been hurt and has been making his way back down river to our camp," Will's hands were shaking slightly. "He got caught by an alpha shortly after we split… I guess our small town isn't the only place being ruined by the 'traditionalists' movement. He ran out of scent blockers, Hannibal."

Grasping Will in a tight hug and emitting the most soothing scent he can manage, Hannibal clutches Will like a life line. "Will, I'm so sorry to hear that. When was that letter sent?"

"As soon as the weather broke," Will answers, feeling himself beginning to shake with a sob he refused to let out. "He should be here by autumn if they're going by foot and boat."

"You have a spare bedroom in your quarters or we can use a communal spare," Hannibal whispers in his ear. "If you can divine his rough location, I can send faster means of travel to him. I can bring him home much quicker."

"Alpha," Will doesn't answer as the realization of what his dad has been through rocks his core. "Please… he's…" Will was trembling much more than slightly. "He's bringing home my little brother." A light burst in its socket as Will momentarily lost control of his magic at how much the sentence sobered him. There wasn't anything to be mad about now. There was nothing to forgive, because all Will needed right now was his alpha. He had to get out his entire breakdown now, otherwise he wouldn't be able to be the rock his father would need.

There was no divining Beau's location. Will was unable due to some sort of protective magic, so the pair was forced to wait. Another letter did find its way to Will and Hannibal, and it was a far happier letter. Beau assured them he was okay, and Will's little brother, Bobby, was enjoying the trek. To keep his mind busy, Will continued to work on the sprawling raised gardens with pathways. Gravel made up the base of the paths, and he ordered in large, circular, flat stones to comfortably step on. Despite their argument, Will did let Hannibal help him now… he had to admit it was quite nice to have a wendigo's strength on his side.

Another letter found its way into Will's hands that had to be quickly shucked of gardening gloves as he was placing tomato plants into one of the lower raised beds. Being the last week of May, the frosts were definitely no longer a threat and plants would flourish well. Much like Will's anxiety at the contents if the letter. Bobby was running a high fever with a cough, and they had to stop to see a doctor. In an attempt to be reassuring, Hannibal assured Will that it was quite normal for small children to get sick on long treks. It did little to quell the

nervous anxiety. Given the date on the letter was from early May, whatever had happened already happened. They could only wait on the next letter to find out how he was.

Baby poultry arrived the first week of June. They were mail ordered, and Will was practically bursting with excitement when the post master, Mark, drove up the drive to personally deliver them.

“Would you mind opening the box and checking the contents before I leave?” Mark asked as he passed over the first box.

“Of course,” Will nodded, unable to help his excitement. The crown atop his head seemed brighter, flowers more vibrant with the absolute delight that he was exuding. His scent smelled of the earth he worked in so often and fragrant field flowers. Hannibal couldn’t blame Mark for smiling and watching Will, and he found himself not hit with the urge to plan a dinner.

Mark was an alpha, yes, but he was far past the age he considered himself willing to find a mate at. Instead, he just treated the handful of people he genuinely liked as family. Fortunate they were, that Mark treated them both with that same fondness. Softened by Will, Hannibal found himself purring softly as Will began to count and check over the chicks in the first box. He didn’t even find himself annoyed when Mark joined in quietly as the courting pair purred.

“Twenty five Easter eggers… twenty five white leg horn… twenty five light brahma… and twenty five black sex link,” Will muttered to himself before signing the paper on top with a grin, “Plus some extra of each.”

Mark passed over the next box with a small grin, knowing full well Will was going to be surprised when he read it. “Now check this one over.”

Blinking, Will look confused for a moment before looking to Hannibal. Smiling and rubbing a hand between Will’s shoulder blades, Hannibal purred, “Another courting gift if you’ll accept.”

Barely managing to hold back kissing Hannibal in front of Mark, Will nods quickly. “I’ll accept.”

This second box contained 16 gosling that were quite miffed at being kept in a box for so long, and Will noticed that twelve looked the same each other. The other four, while identical to each other, were different in their coloring. After staring for a moment, it clicked in Will’s brain. “Pilgrim geese.” He stared at Hannibal in absolute delight before closing and signing the paper on top.

Handing Will a third box, Mark’s grin is wide enough to look like it must hurt. “Don’t forget this one.”

“More?” Will raised an eyebrow at Hannibal, absolutely beaming as he carefully opened this box. An assortment of ducklings squeaked at him and began leaping for the light. To count them all required Hannibal’s help, and Will was laughing softly the entire time. “Thirty

ducks…" He folds the flap back down to check the paper. "Assorted, hatchery choice." He signs it without hesitation.

"You couldn't decide on what ones you preferred most," Hannibal fills in with a smile, extremely pleased Will was loving his courting gifts. "Running with that thought in mind, I assumed an assortment would fit your likes the most."

"Hannibal they're perfect," Will stares up at him, smile positively radiant.

"As are you, my beloved," Hannibal hums and leans to chastely kiss Will, who reciprocated to Hannibal's surprise.

"Thank you," Will whispered against his lips, looking Hannibal in the eye.

"Don't thank me yet," Hannibal winks, "You're not finished opening your gifts."

When Will moved to face Mark again, he was met with the sight of another box with holes in it. This one made weird grunts and chirps and calls… it had scurrying noises and borderline car alarm noises… Will honestly couldn't place what the hell it was until a feathered head poke out from one of the holes. Coturnix quail. A good many by the sounds of it. Peeling the lid just slightly up, he thanked Hannibal repeatedly as he counted twenty on one side and twenty on the other. The happy rumbling purr continued from Hannibal, his alphan instincts thoroughly satiated from Will's thorough acceptance.

"I hope you ain't tired of gifts yet," Mark teased with a wide grin that matched Hannibal's. Watching them court filled Mark with a sense of pride that all hope wasn't lost yet. Perhaps more folks still held better values than the newly vocal ones.

"Hannibal," Will shot him an incredulous look when Mike walked over to the trunk and popped it. "What the hell did you order?"

"Anything I thought you might like," Hannibal was beaming as he answered, and, while he thought this was a bit much, Will couldn't help but feel pleased. The omegan instincts he never really let flourish due to being on the move absolutely pleased. The strongest alpha he'd ever met was making all of his childhood dreams come true. He had the homestead he always dreamed of having so him and his dad never had to move again. He had his own calves, goats, and sheep, and now he had his own birds. He even had the alpha he never let himself hope for… one that was moving towards the same goal of self sustaining for the most part. The extra money really didn't matter to Will, but it sure smoothed the path from an overgrown path to a cobblestone road.

"Hannibal…" Will felt himself tearing up and turned to hug his alpha tightly, his flower crown antlers tapping into Hannibal with how close he pressed his face into Hannibal's shoulder. Without thinking much, he openly scented Hannibal in front of Mark before he pulled away to look in the trunk. Hannibal was frozen in place, beyond thrilled at the public display of affection Will gave him without even getting embarrassed after. It was beyond what Hannibal expected, and they weren't even through with the gifts.

“Hannibal!” Will almost shouted as he looked back over at Hannibal from the trunk. “Cabinet incubator and hatcher?!”

Serene smile on his face, Hannibal replied, “Only the best for my beloved.”

There were also various medicines they may need as the birds grew, and a variety of health supplements that they couldn’t find in stores. By themselves in a large box, Will was also astounded to see well over a hundred dahlia tubers from a farm he had bought the catalogue for the year prior. Each gift was met with shock and praise, and Will couldn’t help how sweet his scent had gotten.

By the end of it, Will’s irises were the soft gold of an extremely pleased omega. Hannibal had never seen it from Will, he’d almost begun to wonder if Will was an omega without the gold eyes. Rare to hear of, even more rare to hear of, but not entirely out of the question. Even in preheat, Will never had golden eyes of any sort. Not even a muddying of his blue eyes or flecks. The sight made him growl lowly before he could stop himself. Far from territorial, it was possessive and heated. Also made both Will and Mark blush deeply at hearing it, and apologies were quickly given to Mark.

Before Mark could leave when all the gifts and birds were safely in the house, Will slipped a hundred dollar bill into his hand. “Accept this, please.”

“Will,” Mark was shaking his head and trying to hand it back. “I can’t! Th-th-this is t-t-t-too much.”

Quickly stepping back, Will raised his hands up, “It’s for your bringing all of this out. I deeply appreciate your judgement in bringing it all out to us and your friendship.”

“Th-th-this is more th-than I make in a we-week,” Mark stared at Will, who just smiled back.

“Then enjoy yourself, get something you need,” Will answered. “Just don’t give it back. I wouldn’t give it if I would miss it. Hannibal here,” Will laughs fondly as he looks over Hannibal, “Doesn’t let me spend my own money on much around here. It’s a waste sitting where it isn’t needed.” Mark looked ready to argue again, so Will held a hand up in front of himself, “I’ll be offended if you don’t take it.”

No longer arguing, Mark took the cash offered to him. After the war, money became a lot more valuable since everything crashed and was practically rebuilt. Governments weren’t free from this rebuild either, and they were extremely far from perfect. But at least omegas weren’t property like other places, and magically gifted folk could get by without worry of death. Though technology wasn’t widespread anymore in weird ways, and electricity was hit or miss in a lot of places. So if someone was offering a large sum of cash, most people eventually caved in for whatever was asked.

Once Mark left, the courting pair set to work on getting all the new additions set up in their new homes. Will understood now why Hannibal insisted on having extra bins set up just in case, and they were completely filled now. For about an hour, Will just sat and watched the little guys mill about. There were some pasty butts on the chicks, but that was easily remedied with washing. Electrolytes and probiotics would take care of any shipping sickness

over the next few days to a week. Rather than heat lamps they couldn't find, Will set up a heating charm in each bin. They'd last about week, but he'd change them out every four days or so to be safe.

Life was quiet enough, and over the following few days they got the rest of the gardens planted. Quite a bit of their plantings were prostate from the local nursery. Next year, they would make full use of their own greenhouses. With the main raised beds and things set up, they then turned their attention to a large plot set just off of the omega quarters' French doors.

Having decided he'd keep Beau and Bobby in his own quarters, Will also decided to fence in about an acre off the side of the house. A large play area was next on their construction list, and they took this time to talk over children. Will actually broached the topic first as they were finishing off the slide attached to a two story play house.

"Hannibal?" Will asked, voice carefully neutral as he treaded new ground. He continued when Hannibal looked at him with a slight cock to his head. "How many children do you think you want?"

Surprised, Hannibal thinks for a moment. "I'm not sure… as many as you're willing to give me, I suppose. This homestead was made for a large family."

Blush creeping into his ears, Will swallows thickly. "I always wanted a big family. And now that they'll have an older brother of an uncle… and their grandpa close by…"

"Do you have a number in mind?" Hannibal asks as he finishes drilling in the last large bolt to secure the slide in place.

"I always thought five kids would be nice," Will answered, voice almost shaky. "And if we get that room, I would definitely be open to having more if you are."

"Are you okay having children that come out like me?" Hannibal asks, his turn to have a carefully neutral voice now. There's a more than slight fear that Will might reject the idea of having children that require flesh over all else. That he might reject such qualities in Hannibal, himself, in turn.

"Never having to worry over my children dying if I live as long as you is a blessing," Will smiles easily. "I would prefer it."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long update. Not the best at fluff and trying to balance between angst and the like is difficult hahaha I've accidentally put horrible horrible shit in a few times and had to go back and rewrite haha

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!